



Talking sound: How Audio is Produced

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By Tristan Rose on 3rd May 2016

GCRS' sound designer Tristan Rose on how important sound quality is and some tips on overcoming any sound mishaps.

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The issue of unintelligible dialogue [hit the headlines](#) again recently when BBC series *Happy Valley* was singled out for containing dialogue that was hard to hear and mumbled. It's not the first time we've heard of TV dramas being criticised for poor sound design, leaving viewers frustrated and threatening drops in audience ratings.

This is the last thing production companies want to see happen, but what is the process behind recording dialogue for TV and TVCs and how can that process be broken down?



First things first: How is dialogue captured?

There are two ways to record sound on set: Lapel microphones and booms. Each of these methods has its pros and cons.

Lapel mics are easily hidden and are fine for capturing the sound of a sit down interview but may not be as reliable at picking up sound in scenes where there is lots of movement. For instance, they may pick up the rustle of clothing as they have to be hidden.



Boom mics do not suffer as much from the problem of muffled clothes but they are big cumbersome objects that need to be held above the actors' heads and remain out of shot. Today's directors and production companies are under increased pressure to deliver the goods as quickly as possible and for as low a budget as possible. This means there may not be time for re-shooting a scene if the shot has been impaired with the accidental appearance of a boom mic. Less experienced directors may be weary of using a boom mic as they'd like to avoid the possibility of incorrect framing of a shot or the boom mic looming into view.



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In an ideal world, these two options should be used together. That means that the director can pick and choose from the two recordings to ensure that they have captured the sound accurately and have options on perspective. This should then alleviate the need for a third recording option: ADR.

So, what is ADR?

Automated dialogue replacement is the process of re-recording dialogue that - due to one of 100 reasons - needs to be captured again by the actor during post-production. The challenges facing TV productions are numerous but, when it comes to dialogue, technical issues on set and changes in edit or storyline may result in a need for re-recording. Coupled with reduced post budgets and complex talent availability, coordinating ADR can be tricky.





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What other challenges do sound professionals face?

It is impossible to take into account all of the different types of ways in which we watch content today. Flatscreen TVs have less space for speakers than previous TV models - which is something that respected home entertainment dealer, Richer Sounds, has noticed. And so, despite the fact that modern televisions look fantastic, the sound quality is nearly always compromised.

Sound professionals will judge recordings and mixes on high-end specialist monitoring which they can assess in the studio and then determine how it will translate onto small speakers, large speakers, CRTs and laptops.

What about ADR in particular?

Actors can feel resentful about taking part in ADR sessions. They can feel like they've done the work once and may be reluctant to repeat it, just for the sake of improving the sound quality.

But at the end of the day, sound quality is sound quality is a crucial part of getting the message across in TV dramas and TVCs, and so should be treated carefully so as not to lose audiences or consumers.

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